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## Words From An Old Friend.

Catharine Merrill

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# THE MAN SHAKESPEARE

AND OTHER ESSAYS BY  
CATHARINE MERRILL  
WITH IMPRESSIONS AND  
REMINISCENCES OF THE  
AUTHOR BY MELVILLE  
B. ANDERSON, AND WITH  
SOME WORDS OF APPRE-  
CIATION FROM JOHN MUIR



FROM THE STEELE PORTRAIT

*Catharine Merrill*

✓  
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#### WORDS FROM AN OLD FRIEND

Miss Merrill was the first friend I found in Indiana, and one of the kindest, wisest, and most helpful of my life. I first met her about thirty-five years ago through a letter of introduction from Professor J. D. Butler, when I was studying plants and rocks around Indianapolis. Knowing how shy I was, and fearing I might not deliver his letter he took pains to tell how rare and good she was in heart and mind, and to assure me that at first sight all bashful misery would vanish, for none better than she knew that "a man's a man for a' that." And so it proved. She became interested in my studies, loaned me books, and I soon learned to admire her scholarship, keen, sane, kindly criticism, the wonderful range of her sympathies, her kindness in always calling attention to the best in the character of any one under discussion living or dead, and her weariless, unostentatious, practical benevolence

#### THE MAN SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS

in smoothing as she was able the pathways of others and helping them up into wider, brighter, purer living. But it was in a time of trouble, then drawing nigh, that I learned to know her well. While at work in a mill my right eye was pierced by a file, and then came the darkest time of my life. I was blind for months and the blindness threatened to be lasting and complete. She came to my darkened room an angel of light, with hope and cheer and sympathy purely divine, procured the services of the best oculist and the children she knew I loved. And when at last after long months of kindness and skill she saw me out in Heaven's sunshine again, fairly adrift in the glorious bloom of the spring, her joy was as great as my own.

And in her beautiful life how many others has she lifted up,—cheered and charmed out of darkness into light! Few have left the world so widely beloved, and it is not easy for those who knew her to speak of her without apparent excess.

She was tall, rather frail looking, with broad brow and wonderful eyes, a countenance glow-

ing with kindness and as free from guile as a child's. She was an admirable scholar, with perfect mental independence, and her heart was one of the kindest and least selfish I ever found. Those who knew her best loved her best, and almost worshiped her. Everywhere she was welcomed like light—in social gatherings, clubs and camps, homes and schools, asylums, hospitals, churches and jails; for she was a natural teacher and helper, a bearer of others' burdens, brightener of others' joys. None could be near her without being made better. One was lifted and strengthened simply by seeing her. The weary and troubled went to her as the thirsty to a well. Her home was a center of heart sunshine. Like a stream with deep fountains she was a friend on whom we could depend, always the same, steady as a star. And like streams and stars in their flowing and shining she seemed wholly unconscious of the good she was doing. However important the work in hand she never appeared to be in a hurry or laboring beyond her strength. In the midst of striving crowds she seemed calm, gaining her ends with apparent ease. She followed the

well-beaten roads of humanity with the enthusiasm and freshness of perception of the explorer in new fields. Before her all embracing sympathy obstacles melted. Humble, devout, reverent in presence of life's mysteries, her faith in the final outcome of good never varied, while humor and common sense preserved her from extravagance of opinion and language.

She had a profound knowledge of human nature, and her judgment and sagacity in practical affairs enabled her not only to give good advice, but to get things done; love and sympathy giving wonderful insight. Her eye took in all humanity, studying characteristics of states and nations as well as individuals in every walk of life, tracing springs of action through all concealments as an explorer traces the fountain heads of rivers, searching out ways of being good and doing good, never discouraged, leaving results to be as God pleased; bowing in storms like a slender plant and springing up again; rejoicing in all truth, especially happy when she discovered something to praise in what seemed only evil, some good motive where only bad ones had been known.

Though always busy, valuing each day as it came out of eternity, she always had time for others, as if she had no pleasures or pains of her own, no temptations to fight against, no perturbing passions. She made her way through the scrambling, fighting, loving, hating, suffering, rejoicing world with no more apparent perplexity or effort than the world itself displays in making its way through the heavens.

She had a rare gift of teaching, and most of her life was devoted to it. An enthusiastic student and lover of literature, she kept inspiringly close to the minds of her scholars and easily led them to do their best, while her downright, steadfast, glowing goodness gained their hearts. Above all she was a builder of character, teaching the great art of right-living, holding up by word and example the loftiest ideals of conduct, fidelity to conscience and duty, and plain unchanging foundational righteousness as the law of life under whatever circumstances. And these noble lessons went home to the hearts of her pupils.

Conservative, believing in hard work, follow-

ing Heaven's ever old, ever new, love-lighted ways, placing no dependence on plans for getting something for nothing—comfortable inventions for abolishing ignorance and sin—machinery for hoisting humanity to spiritual heights, salvation by ballots, etc., she nevertheless welcomed new ideas with hospitality, eager to discover something useful in new plans however little they promised, humbly hoping and groping through life's sad cloudy places as best she could, holding fast the good as she was able to see it, under whatever garb, steadied by a rare sanity and robust commonsense applicable to every situation. And this breadth and steadiness of mind, combined with immeasurable sympathy, bound her scholars to her through life. No wonder they never forgot her. "To know her was a liberal education."

Nothing in all her noble love-laden life was more characteristic than its serenity. Of the showy reformer crying aloud in the confidence of comfortable ignorance there was never a trace. Going about humbly among all sorts of people she did what she could of the good that was nearest, preaching without sermons, in-

*WORDS FROM AN OLD FRIEND*

formal as sunshine, her whole life a lesson of faith, hope and charity.

Though I saw but little of her after the first year or two in Indiana, her gracious influence, not easily put into words, never lost its charm. Go where I would in my long, lonely wanderings "the idea of her life would sweetly glide into my study of imagination," and so, I doubt not, it was with her friends near and far.

She never grew old. To her last day her mind was clear, and her warm heart glowed with the beauty and enthusiasm of youth. In loving hearts she still lives, and loving hearts are her monument.

JOHN MUIR.

**THE MAN SHAKESPEARE  
AND OTHER ESSAYS**

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